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Contact information for person submitting document:

Name: Nabil Isifan	Email: nisifan@netham.net
Telephone number: +972599266441	Today's date: 22/10/2009



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NETHAM RULE OF PROJECT NEWSLETTER, VOL. 1 NO.4

The First Perceptions Survey on the Judicial Authority

The USAID-funded, Netham Rule of Law Project, assisted the Supreme Judicial Council in carrying out the first comprehensive survey of the Judicial Authority titled “Perceptions of the Palestinian Authority Judiciary: a survey of Judges, Lawyers, Court Users, Court Staff, and the Public.”

The survey was conducted by Arab World Center for Research and Development (AWRAD) a professional polling and research firm in the West Bank. This comprehensive survey was implemented based upon a request from the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) in order to assist the institution in obtaining accurate data on the prevailing perceptions of the judiciary. The survey results and recommendations will assist the SJC in monitoring the status of judicial reform, and evaluating performance while working to establish priorities and deal with issues related to the judiciary. Equally important, the survey is a key tool in monitoring the progress made towards achieving the goals of the Supreme Judicial Council Strategy for the years 2008-2010.

The results of the study were published in a 160-page report which Netham printed for distribution in Arabic and English. Additionally Netham supported the SJC in holding a presentation to unveil the results of the survey on “Perceptions of the Palestinian Authority Judiciary.” The Chief Justice opened

the presentation which was held on April 16, 2009 at the Grant Park Hotel by welcoming guests and thanking USAID and Netham for all its efforts in assisting the SJC. The report which contains six sections illustrates the main findings and gives recommendation regarding each one of the five sample groups surveyed.

Analyzing the main results, the survey revealed that the Palestinian public holds to a certain extent a positive perception towards the judiciary with 74% of the public referring to the judiciary as fair; 64% referred to the judiciary as fair to a high degree and 10% as fair to an average extent. In another question, 72% responded that the judiciary is impartial and has integrity. As to confidence in the judiciary, judges were the most trusted group from among the different groups related to the judiciary which included judges, lawyers, court staff, public prosecution and police. Attorneys constituted the least trusted group according to the view expressed by the public, court users, litigants and court staff. In addition, two thirds of the lawyers and 60% of the litigants who participated in the survey believe that cases before the court take a long time in order to be disposed. The reasons for the delay in processing cases according to these two groups are attributed to the notification procedures in place and the absence of witnesses.

In conclusion, the survey results show that there is a vital need to improve the public’s perception towards the Palestinian Judiciary in terms of fairness, integrity, and impartiality in addition to providing stakeholders with comprehensive information to inform and guide strategic decision-making in the justice sector. The survey recommends providing the public with more information regarding the performance of the judiciary and to make such information accessible to the public. Another key recommendation is to develop mechanisms to improve the relationship between judges and lawyers.



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(left to right) Dr. Rafiq Al-Husseini (podium) with Nader Said, Chief Justice Issa Abu Sharrar, and Nabil Isifan at an event to mark the unveiling of the Perceptions Survey on the Judiciary

USAID Launches a Legal Education Program at Al-Quds University



USAID Mission Director, addresses Al-Quds University students during launching of Netham's Legal Education Program

The USAID-funded Netham Rule of Law Project launched a new Legal Education Program in partnership with Al Quds University (AQU) School of Law on October 29, 2008. The opening ceremony at AQU in Abu-Dis was held with the participation of AQU's President, Sari Nusseibeh; USAID Mission Director, Howard Sumka; the Dean of School Faculty, Dr. Mohammad Shalaldeh along with Palestinian Officials and over 400 law students.

The event concluded with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between AQU and USAID which states activities in enhancing the legal education.

The Legal Education Program focuses on strengthening the rule of law by building the capacity of AQU through the development and improvement of curricula, teaching strategies and course materials. The Program involves in developing the

following courses: Legal Writing, Moot Court, Legal Ethic and Legal Clinic. The Program has set up a computer laboratory and updating the law library; expanding the English language curriculum; publishing course reference materials; and facilitating exchange programs between AQU School of Law and American universities, in particular the partnership between AQU and the American University in Washington DC (AU).

Subsequently and as part of project efforts, AQU and AU signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on December 20, 2008. The MOA was signed by Dr. Cornelius Kerwin AU President and the Dean of the College of Law, Dr. Claudio Grossman, who were represented by AU Professor David Chavkin. From AQU, the MOA was signed by Dr. Sari Nusseibeh AQU's President and Dr. Mohammad Shalaldeh, Dean of the School of Law.

The Agreement, focusing on a number of exchange programs, sets a framework of cooperation between AU and AQU for five renewable years.

The Memorandum of Agreement specifically supports the following:

- Sending a staff member from AQU Legal Clinic to AU in spring 2009;
- Sending AQU students to the AU to take part in a summer courses;
- Sending students to attend the LL.M. program on International Humanitarian Law and Humanitarian Rights which will begin in fall 2009.
- Arrange a visit to Washington DC in the summer of 2009 as part of Netham's support to enhancing legal ethics.



Interview with Dr. Mohammad Shaladeh, Dean of the Faculty of Law, Al-Quds University

The Faculty of Law at Al-Quds University is a milestone in Palestinian legal education. Established in 1994, it was the first faculty of its kind, and a considerable number of its graduates now hold key positions in the Palestinian legal and judicial systems. The faculty is distinguished by its scholarship and international academic exchange programs - such as the one with American University - and currently has some 700 undergraduate and graduate students.

In an interview with the USAID-funded Netham Project, Dean Mohammad Shaladeh highlighted the law faculty's achievements and meaningful cooperation with Netham.

Question: Tell us about the legal education program. When did it start and why?

Answer: The legal education program is the product of a Memorandum of Understanding signed on September 14, 2008 between the President of Al-Quds University, Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, and the USAID Mission Director, Dr. Howard Sumka. The aim of the program is to enhance legal education for law students and for professors, and to strengthen the related faculties and facilities at the university.

The program, which is supported by USAID/Netham is split into two parts: the first is building a five year strategic plan for the faculty to enhance the capacity of administration and professors. The second part centers on expanding legal education by adding important courses to the curriculum, such as Law & Society and Legal Ethics. All these courses were supported through USAID/Netham, and coordinated with the American University in Washington D.C. We have had visiting professors from abroad who lectured on these subjects as well.

Question: How did the cooperation with USAID/Netham on this program enhance and improve the performance of the Law School at Al Quds University?

Answer: This cooperation gave the faculty a unique advantage compared to law schools at other Palestinian universities. For example, USAID/Netham provided us with a well-equipped computer lab which I can easily

say is the best in the country. This lab has as its central goal the enhancement of legal research and education. Also, USAID/Netham supplied us with a complete legal library which is an additional step for improving legal research. Finally, over 20 lecturers are enrolled in the English Training Program which is taught by



Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, Dr. Mohammad Shaladeh, Dr. Cornelius Kerwin,

AMIDEAST and supported by USAID/Netham. The fact that USAID/Netham has a permanent office on campus with qualified staff supports and strengthens this cooperation.

Question: Would you envisage further cooperation with USAID / Netham after the program is over?

Answer: Certainly! We have future ideas which we have passed on to USAID / Netham for future funding, such as producing a journal for the faculty, assistance in lecturing law in English and the establishment of the International Center for Legal Ethics.



Al-Quds University law students accessing recently renovated computer lab

Ministry of Education Launches Civic Education and Rule of Law Awareness Projects

Civic Education can be an important factor in shaping responsible citizens capable of helping to build a democratic and productive society. This type of education focuses on attitudes and particular skills whose acquisition begins in childhood, making schools an ideal partner in teaching civics. Raising students' awareness of the concept of rule of law and other civic education issues can broadly contribute to creating responsible citizens. With this goal in mind, Netham launched in September 2008 a cooperative project with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to support and enhance the civic education curriculum in Palestinian schools.

The needs assessment, which was conducted prior to the program's design, indicated an urgent need to support the enhancement of the Civic Education curriculum and to build the capacity of Civic Education teachers to teach the subject effectively. Based on these findings, Netham developed a work plan and met frequently with MoE officials across all levels to arrive at a consensus on the major areas of assistance that Netham would provide. Accordingly, Netham and the MoE formed four joint working groups to follow up on the implementation of different activities to promote Civic Education and enhance lessons on rule of law taught in Palestinian schools.

Netham has been working with the MoE on four activities:

1. Assist the MoE in Conducting a Comprehensive Review and Evaluation of the Civic Education Program Content and Teaching Methodologies for grades 1 to 9.

This review is considered the first of its kind in Palestine and MoE officials say it will serve as a basis for further review and development of the Palestinian school curricula. Netham provided a content review and analysis training to MoE staff who will be leading the review, enabling them to conduct tasks efficiently. At the end of the process, Netham will develop a Comprehensive Review and Evaluation Report that will include information from all stages of the review process as well as recommendations for enhancing civic education programs in schools. The result of the review, as well as the recommendations, will be discussed with the MoE and will be used to create a Civic Education Development Action Plan which the Ministry expects to use in developing its civic education programs.

2. Building the Capacity of Civic Education Teachers by providing

Training and Developing a Civic Education Guide Manual

Through this activity, a pool of 44 Palestinian experts will be trained in civics, and a civic education manual will be developed to help teachers use interactive teaching methods, such as case studies, which enhance critical thinking and research. This pool of expert teachers is expected to subsequently train hundreds of teachers throughout the West Bank, who also will introduce to their classrooms methods from the manual and skills acquired through this training.

3. Rule of Law Awareness Award

This awareness-raising activity aims to acknowledge and award schools, teachers and student councils for activities and projects that promote the rule of law and have made an impact on schools and communities. Netham, in cooperation with MoE officials, has prepared a media strategy and implemented a media campaign that included running newspaper ads and distributing topical posters and brochures in Palestinian schools. The best projects will be selected by a committee from the MoE and civil society organizations, and will be awarded in a special ceremony to mark Justice Day. This award has been officially sponsored by Jawwal.

4. Creative Writing (Short Story – Rule of Law Script)

The purpose of this activity, which falls under the responsibility of the Extra-Curricular Activities Division at the MoE, is to create greater rule of law awareness amongst Palestinian youth. This exercise will encourage students to showcase their creativity by penning a short story or a script showcasing the solution to a problem related to the rule of law that they have experienced or simply wish to address. To help ensure successful implementation, Netham provided a special orientation session for sixteen school supervisors throughout the West Bank and designed a brochure to inform and guide interested students. So far, more than five thousand

students have participated in the activity, and 40 short stories have been selected and will be printed in book form and distributed to the schools. Four plays, based on the best four scripts, will be performed in schools to raise awareness on the concept of rule of law. It is expected that the students who submit the best story and script will be awarded in a special ceremony hosted by the Ministry of Education.

This program, developed in cooperation with international and local consultants, is the first program of its kind at the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Education.



Developing a Publicly Accessible Justice Record System at the Ministry of Justice



MOJ staff trainees

The Justice Record System is a critical component of the judiciary. The system can identify persons with a criminal record and, on request, produce non-conviction certificates for individuals with clean records. In that sense, the Justice Record is a database of information on individuals who have committed crimes and are considered a threat to society. The public often requests such certificates in applying for jobs, international visas, and a number of other transactions.

The Justice Record system, in its current version, is perceived by the public as vulnerable to corruption and abuse of civil rights. The public expresses not just concerns about the system's transparency, but also strong dissatisfaction with the procedures in general, particularly with lack of efficiency and the amount of time required to issue the certificates of non-conviction.

Netham has been helping the Ministry of Justice develop a Justice Record system capable of providing to the citizens this critical service with greater efficiency and transparency. This would entail eliminating the potential for abuse, reducing the processing time for the non-conviction certificates, and unifying work procedures.

With these goals in mind, Netham helped the Ministry to introduce greater automation, streamline the system's processes and improve

the general environment in which these public services are provided. Processes were streamlined, and processing time sped up by the application of the principle of presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Following this principle, the system was able to release around 90% of the Palestinian citizens who were seeking non-conviction certificates and had been following long and unnecessary procedures. Once the candidates are entered into the system, and a thorough search turns up no criminal record, the non-conviction certificates can be issued.

The new system aims to strike a balance between protecting the privacy of individuals and protecting the community against crime, and will provide specific guarantees against abuse. The system also permits the citizen to contest any false records or incorrect data according to a defined mechanism and in accordance with the law.

Working with Ministry of Justice counterparts, Netham's assistance focused on planning and system re-engineering. The project assisted in revising the current processes of the system, suggesting upgrades and modifications and facilitated the re-engineering of the current processes using the latest technology. Next, software was developed at the Ministry of Justice to facilitate data entry and retrieval of records.

The upgraded system will be fully operational next month. Netham is now working to develop a systematic feeding data mechanism for records. In preparing to feed records into the Justice Record database, Netham has helped the Ministry of Justice compile the data from its sources. The data needed comes from judgment briefs – in this case, paper files lying on the shelves of public prosecution offices and dating back to 1993.

Netham facilitated the compiling of data by assisting the Ministry of Justice in, first, defining a mechanism for compilation and creating a task force for this purpose, and, second, providing a lightweight, movable photocopier.

Currently Netham is assisting the Justice Record Department's data entry center to feed the system with criminal data in an appropriate and timely way. Netham has provided to the Justice Record Department six interns trained in appropriate data entry techniques. In addition, Netham assisted the Ministry of Justice to develop an audit method for the data entry process and helped to develop a pre-entry system that enables the Justice Record staff to organize and clean the data before entering it into the system.

As a final step, Netham worked with the Ministry of Justice to identify a new location for the Justice Records Public Service Office, where services would be provided in a more comfortable and respectful environment. After a location was chosen, Netham prepared a procurement and implementation plan to refurbish and equip the location with appropriate equipment and furniture, along with direction signs and information boards. Netham also trained the Ministry IT staff to build their capacity and enable them to fully support and trouble-shoot the system.

Once the system is able to produce its first official criminal record certificate, the system, along with the renovated location housing it will be officially inaugurated and opened to the public.



Netham Rule of Law Project Supports the Training of Newly Appointed Judges

From October 2008 to February 2009, forty newly appointed West Bank judges, divided into four groups, each received two weeks training at the Jordanian Judicial Institute in Amman sponsored by the USAID-funded Netham Rule of Law Project. The training included sessions on applicable laws and litigation skills in addition to site tours to Jordanian judicial premises such as courthouses, forensic labs, the criminal investigation department and others. Prior to the practical training in Jordan, the judges received seven weeks of theoretical training at the Palestinian Judicial Institute in Ramallah. Practical training for the judges with Jordanian counterparts was also conducted, which included adjudicating a variety of civil, criminal, land, tenancy, and labor cases.

The new-judge training in Jordan received enthusiastic reviews from the new judges. A post-training evaluation report, compiled by Netham, showed that 99% of the trainees believed that the training helped them to enhance their knowledge and skills and was useful in identifying weaknesses and strengths. In addition, 91% of the trainees said that the training material was appropriate and in line with the objectives of the training program, while 87% of the trainees believed that the content of the training was thought provoking. Some 83% of participants believed that the training material included up to date information and knowledge, along with activities that aimed at developing practical skills. The evaluation report was based on in-house questionnaires developed by Netham.

"Now I feel more confident as a Judge and I look positively to a better future" said Judge Falastin Abu Roumi from the Bethlehem Conciliatory Court. "The training course was of a high standard and the judges conducting the training are very knowledgeable in their field, especially the High Court Judges. We felt that they genuinely wanted us to learn and benefit from the training," said Judge Abu Roumy. She also added, "As judges from the Conciliation Court, we gained practical experience in this course especially in court management, session management and in maintaining the court's respect and prestige without taking advantage of our power as judges."

The training course was designed and implemented subsequent to a request by the Chief Justice Issa Abu Sharar to assist in training new judges and preparing them to take the bench. These new judges will serve in the Conciliation and First Instance Courts across the West Bank. Upon the return of the first round of judges Chief Justice expressed his gratitude in the Palestinian media, to USAID's Netham Rule of Law Project for organizing the training course and contributing to the development of the Palestinian judiciary.

Criminal Case Management Workshops for Judges

Netham is sponsoring a series of four, intensive, 3-day workshops on improving criminal case management in Palestinian courts. "The best workshop I have ever attended" exclaimed several of the fifty two Palestinian Judges who participated in the first two workshops held during March and April at the Grand Park Hotel in Ramallah. Animated discussions on criminal law dominated the workshop hours. Two Jordanian judges, Dr. Adel Rahman Tawfeek and Dr. Ali Au Hjeleh, are leading the workshops with great knowledge and enthusiasm. Judge participants said that the workshops are particularly

useful because the Jordanian Judge trainers used examples that are directly related to Palestine

Judge Adnan Shwaybi, Deputy Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Council, opened the first workshop. He praised the dedication of the Palestinian judges, encouraged the improvement of criminal case management in Palestine, and thanked USAID and the Netham project for sponsoring the workshop. The second workshop was inaugurated by the Chief Justice, Issa Abu Sharar, who thanked the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and its King as well as the Chief Justice of Jordan, the Jordanian Minister of Justice and the president of the Jordanian Training Institute for their interest in helping to upgrade the skills of the Palestinian judiciary. Judge Ra'ad Abdul Hamid, director of Judge Education at the Supreme Judicial Council, moderated the first workshop activities and discussion and High Court Judge, Iman Nasser Al Din moderated at the second workshop.

Topics covered during the workshop included filing, registration and procedures of criminal cases; detention and preservative arrest; evidence in criminal cases; application of Criminal Procedures Law; and issuing judgments. These Criminal Case Management workshops are the first two of four three-day workshops to be held for judges in Palestine. Workshops are being held once per month in March, April, May and June, 2009. These workshops and the ones to follow support Netham's workplan activities aimed at building judicial capacity and improving case management in the West Bank.

Chief Judges' Court Administration Training Orientation

Twenty Chief Judges of West Bank courts and senior members of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), including the Chief Justice, met in Jericho on March 26 and 27, 2009 to discuss key court administration issues. Topics discussed included the role of the new SJC Court Administration Department (CAD) and major court administration challenges facing the courts. Following these discussions, the chief judges and SJC members generated suggestions for addressing major challenges and ideas for next steps in improving court administration.

The workshop was opened by the Chief Justice (CJ), Issa Abu Sharar, who welcomed all participants and thanked USAID for funding and organizing this activity and others. The Chief Justice's speech focused on the remarkable achievements of the SJC and Courts. He particularly noted strategic planning efforts, the institutionalizing



SJC staff take part in training at the Jordanian Judicial Institute





Judge Eman Naser Eddin in one of the workshops

of the SJC and the Courts work all over the West Bank, the establishment of the Court Administration Department (CAD), and the hiring of new judges and employees. The CJ expressed great appreciation to President Abbas and the Prime Minister for their continuous support of judicial independence. The Chief Justice confirmed the importance of this meeting toward improving court administration, enhancing the capacity of judges and increasing the level of coordination between all courts and judges.

Judge Izzat Ramini, Director of the newly formed CAD, welcomed all participants and expressed appreciation for the role of USAID in supporting the establishment of the CAD and development of the CAD's annual workplan, organizational structure and draft bylaws. Judge Ramini then briefed participants on details concerning the roles and responsibilities of the CAD and led discussions concerning the contents of the workplan and bylaws and challenges facing courts. Some major administration challenges facing the courts identified by the chief judges included:

- Unifying case management procedures in the Palestinian court system
- Communication between courts and between chief judges of Palestinian courts concerning court administration issues as well as legal issues
- Communication and cooperation between justice sector partners and
- Financial administration of the courts

Some of the Judges' Recommendations for addressing challenges included:

- Hold regular monthly meetings for chief judges and the CAD to address pertinent issues.
- Create a monthly bulletin from the CAD to all courts communicating new efforts, planned activities, and legal updates.
- Establish a specialized, non-judicial "court administrator" position in each court.
- Activate coordination with justice sector partners to address case management issues.
- Train judges in the use of the judicial database of High Court Decisions.
- Address financial court issues by increasing court petty cash, establishing a procurement commission to follow-up regularly on related issues, and decentralizing some procedures.
- Establish a committee to study issues related to pending cases and make recommendations for solutions.

This orientation workshop was the first of regular chief judge meetings to be held in conjunction with the Court Administration Department and aimed at improving court administration in the West Bank. The Chief Justice and CAD Director are taking the chief judges' ideas and suggestions under advisement. Plans to address the issues raised will be discussed and further developed at the next Chief Judge Court Administration meeting. This meeting is the first of regular CAD Chief Judge meetings aimed at improving court administration in West Bank courts. The next Chief Judge Court Administration meeting will be held in May, 2009

Capacity-building Training for Court Administrators

As of April 11, 2009, two hundred three court administrators have been trained as part of Netham's Phase Two Capacity-building Training for Court Administrators. Phase two training focuses on upgrading Al Mizan computer database skills and accuracy, using the new Notification Management System (NMS) software, implementing unified filing and case-processing procedures in all courts, and improving customer relations skills. The first two trainings were given to chief clerks and deputy clerks in Ramallah. These trainings focused on identifying and solving Al Mizan database problems, generating and analyzing reports produced by the Al Mizan database, utilizing the newly developed NMS that is currently being piloted in the Ramallah Notification Department, implementing unified filing procedures, and improving customer relations skills. The following eight training sessions targeted general court administrator staff. They received the Al Mizan and NMS training in three locations: Ramallah, Nablus, and Bethlehem. All court administrators throughout the West Bank will take part in Phase Two Capacity Building Training and receive training in all areas including Al-Mizan and NMS, unified court procedures for all courts, and customer relations training.

The Phase Two Capacity-building Training Plan was developed in coordination with the Supreme Judicial Council Head of Court Administration Department along with his core team members. This plan aims at building the capacity and upgrading the skills of Court Administrators and Court Clerks of First Instance and Conciliation Courts, in addition to Civil Judgment, Notification, and Notary Public staff in order to provide staff with skills and training that will allow them to provide better and more efficient service to the public. These efforts support Netham's work plan activities directed towards implementing a Capacity Building and Training Plan for Court Administrators that aims at supporting improved case management systems in the courts.

Before the development of the training plan, the project held a meeting with the Chief Justice to discuss the proposed training plan, which he preliminarily approved. He then appointed the Head of the CAD and his staff members to work with the project's team to review and finalize the plan. The project's team carried out a series of meetings with the CAD team members to identify the number of trainees per session, times, trainers, venues and other logistics issues. Most of the training will be conducted by trainers from the SJC, while other training, such as Communication and Customer Relations Skills, will be conducted by Netham's team members or consultants. The training began in March, 2009, and is expected to extend through July, 2009.



Success Story

Netham Bolsters Transparency Mechanisms at Civil Judgment Departments



Netham assists SJC in developing transparency mechanisms at the Civil Judgment Department

Each year, hundreds of thousands of dollars in civil fines are paid to West Bank courts by litigants and deposited into bank accounts administered by the Civil Judgment Departments. However, these departments often lack the necessary tools to monitor and administer the deposits, which can compromise transparency, cause delays in processing - and leave thousands of dollars unaccounted for. To tackle this pressing issue and encourage greater transparency, the USAID-funded Netham Project recently provided technical assistance to the Civil Judgment Departments, which has helped

to reshape systems and even to identify a budget surplus at the pilot department.

Netham's assistance centered on systematically identifying and tracking deposits. The project produced a report on the proper identification of accumulated financial deposits and implemented a mechanism of tracking the deposits in the selected pilot Civil Judgment Department. A unified financial management system was developed to ensure the efficiency and accuracy of deposits of civil fines.

The assistance was rolled out in two phases:

Phase One: Visiting and reviewing the

accumulated financial deposits of three Civil Judgment Departments including Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron. After multiple discussions, decisions were undertaken on the most appropriate mechanism for identifying the accumulated financial deposits that could be transferred to the public treasury. Netham then developed a unified financial management system for deposits and disbursements management, along with a report on the mechanism for implementation, and the required Excel data and summary forms.

Phase Two: Pilot implementation of the outcomes of phase one in the Civil Judgment Department in Ramallah. During phase two, Netham hired and trained three interns to enter and classify data according to the new unified procedure. The interns compared account balances and deposits made prior to December 2008 and worked through over 5,000 case files, reviewing, classifying, and recording them in a database especially designed for that purpose. After data entry was complete, Netham analyzed and prepared a report on the outcomes, including a detailed financial analysis.

Results showed financial deposits of approximately \$1.5 million dollars accumulated at the Ramallah Civil Judgment Department. This allowed the department, together with the Chief Justice, to identify a surplus of funds, which can be transferred to the public treasury and used for developing activities of the Supreme Judicial Council. In addition, Netham was able to develop a unified financial deposit management system to facilitate a smooth and efficient process of deposits of civil fines by the defendants and disbursement of funds to the plaintiffs. Consequently, the procedures put in place will allow Civil Judgment Departments to track the civil fines deposited into the courts' accounts, ultimately shoring up public confidence in the Palestinian court system.

Based on the success of this activity, Netham plans to implement a unified financial management procedure in all Civil Judgment Departments throughout the West Bank.

Court	# Of Pending Files Before Intern Project	# Of Pending Files After Intern Project	# Of Files Deposited With Intern Assistance	% Reduction in CJD Case Backload
Ramallah	5220	3999	1121	23.39%
Nablus	4500	3846	654	14.53%
Jenin	5167	2350	2817	54.52%
Hebron	2523	1078	1445	57.27%

Increase in the Number of Cases Disposed in the Civil Judgement Department



Netham Assists the SJC Media and Public Relations Department in Promoting Coverage of the Judiciary

As part of its efforts to strengthen public awareness of the judiciary, the USAID-funded Netham has been working closely with the SJC's newly established Media and Public Relations Department. Over the past two months particular focus was given to improving media cover of the judiciary.

In February, 2009 and in an unprecedented event, the SJC Media and Public Relations Department with the assistance of Netham organized a site visit for various media outlets to the Jenin and Nablus Courthouses. The aim of the visit was to educate journalists on the role and function of the judiciary, and to encourage local press coverage of the courts. This activity falls under the SJC's Media and Public Relations strategy to support public outreach and increase media involvement in promoting the judiciary to the public. More than 20 journalists from print, radio, and television attended this event.



Journalists at Jenin Courthouse

"The most important thing about this trip is that it broke the barrier between the media and judges in Palestine; the fact that we as reporters were able to get to the northern West Bank courts to cover the judiciary was significant as the media mainly focuses on Ramallah" said Mohammad Rajoub, from Ajyal Radio and Al Jazeera Net.

The site visit began at the Jenin Courthouse where Chief Justice Issa Abu Sharar led the journalists inside the court to the newly renovated Notary Public Office, Notification and Civil Judgment Departments. Chief Justice Abu Sharar explained that the new Jenin Courthouse was built to keep in mind better access to court services by the public. He also spoke of the USAID's assistance in development of

the public service departments including installation of an electronic queuing system to facilitate order in these departments, providing furniture and equipment, and training of staff.

In addition the Chief Justice held a press conference after the tour and answered reporter's questions. The Chief Justice spoke of obstacles facing the judiciary and the attempts to overcome these obstacles including case backlog. The reporters were then lead into a court session and were able to film the proceedings.

Following the visit to Jenin Courthouse, the reporters visited the Nablus Courthouse and met with the Chief Judge Mahmoud Jammous. He talked about the changes

which took place in the city after seven years of security chaos but went on to say the Nablus Courthouse is considered one of the top courts in the West Bank.

This event received extensive media coverage and was reported in all three major newspapers as well as TV, radio and the internet. This site visit was also hailed as another important step in providing the press and public with more transparency and access to information on the judiciary.

Media reports on this visit is available on

the SJC's website <http://www.courts.gov.ps>

In another media event held in cooperation with USAID project Aswatona, Netham held a special media session with Chief Justice Issa Abu Sharar and local media representatives to encourage court reporting.

Over 20 key Palestinian media managers across the West Bank representing radio, TV and newspaper outlets attended the special media session which addressed the decision made by the Supreme Judicial Council to open the court hearing sessions to the media and public. The participants welcomed this move and reflected the media's readiness to cover court stories given the right environment, guidelines, and regulations.

The special session included a presentation by the Chief Justice on key accomplishments of the judiciary, as well as addressing some of the obstacles facing the sector. Furthermore the Chief Justice stressed President Mahmoud Abbas's support for the judiciary sector and praised the President for not interfering in the justice sector and maintaining its independence. The Chief Justice also answered questions from journalists on issues including the process of nominating judges to sit on the bench, court procedures and laws, and the judiciary's role in corruption cases.

Tareq Sharif from Wattan TV stated "the discussion was very important; it helped strengthen the relationship between the media and the judicial system." He went on to say "local journalists are somewhat ignorant of the Palestinian law regarding the courts, and lack proper the training in this field."

Hamza Qawasmi from Nawras radio station in Hebron said "the meeting was fruitful; information was available to the journalists and the Chief Justice clarified some major points. I would like to request more meetings and training in reporting court stories."

The media session was widely covered in the news including Wattan TV as well in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida and Al-Ayyam daily newspapers. Additionally, Maan and PNN news reported the event.

Spotlight on the Supreme Judicial Council's Media and Public Relations Department

On October 1 2008, Chief Justice Issa Abu Sharar, the President of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), announced the Council's decision to establish a Media & Public Relations Department. Since its establishment, the Department has had several major achievements with stakeholders including media, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the public. In an interview with the Council's Media & PR Director, Majed Arouri, we found out more about the SJC's successes and future plans.



Majed Arouri - SJC Media Director

Question: What was the purpose for establishing a Media & PR Department at the Supreme Judicial Council?

Answer: The reason behind establishing the Department was to enhance the SJC's relations with the media, the Civil Society Organizations and the official government bodies who deal with the Judicial Authority. Additionally, the role of the Media & Public Relations Department was to raise public awareness of the judiciary, which would lead to greater public engagement and, ultimately, a strengthened justice system.

Question: Can you tell us about some of the Department's achievements to date?

Answer: Despite the fact that the Department was established just six months ago, we have had some major achievements. Among other successes, we have:

- 1) Finalized a three-month strategy which was developed as the preliminary action plan.
- 2) Developed a two-year strategy with the assistance of an international consultant from the USAID-funded Netham Project. The main objectives detailed in the plan are:
 - a. To inform the general public of the processes of the SJC, and to provide and facilitate access to information, in order to restore public confidence in the judiciary.
 - b. To improve the relationship between the SJC and the media and to increase local media's capacity to cover the judiciary for the public good.
 - c. To improve relations between the SJC and CSOs monitoring the activities of the judiciary, by providing timely, relevant information from the judiciary.

The Media Department at the SJC was able to capture the local media's interest in the judiciary in Palestine. Tens of print and audio information items were produced and run by a range of Palestinian outlets on such occasions as the opening of Jenin Court on March, 19 2009.

Also in adherence with our two-year strategic plan, we were able to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the CSOs following several intensive meetings and discussions. More than 16 CSOs signed the MoU, which aims to regulate the relationship between the Council and these organizations.

In addition to the above, we are proud of our quarterly publication Qadaona, which was published in Arabic and English at the beginning of this year. Around 1,500 copies were printed and some were distributed in local newspapers and delivered to diplomatic missions and donor communities in the West Bank.

Question: What are the future plans of the Department?

Answer: Our main focus is the public and restoring their confidence in the judiciary; therefore our plans will concentrate on public outreach activities, including the continued development of SJC's website. Most importantly, we are planning activities for Justice Day, which will include a media campaign, PR activities and other public outreach campaigns.

** Majed Arouri, a media and human rights expert, was appointed as SJC's PR & Media Director in October 2008.*

In our next issue

- Justice Day 2009 celebrations
- Netham's grants program assists in promoting awareness of Rule of Law
- Rule of Law Award and Creative Writing and Script activities
- AMIDEAST carries out English training for faculty and students at Al-Quds University
- Opening of Justice Records Office at the Ministry of Justice

Contact Netham for more information at:

Tel: (02) 297 - 4516/ 7 Fax: (02) 297 - 2230 P.O. Box 4061
Email: netham@netham.net
Al-Whaidi Building, Al-Nahda Street Ramallah

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